

Washington, DC – Rep. Mike Honda and Sen. Barack Obama today introduced a bipartisan bill in their respective chambers that will make America’s students and future labor force more competitive in science-related fields. The bill was introduced at a time when other countries are gaining ground on America in science and technology fields.

Obama (D-IL) and Honda (D-CA) said this bill will help develop a coordinated strategy in the teaching of science, technology, engineering and math education, the fields collectively known as STEM. The “Enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education Act of 2008” (H.R. 6104) will create mechanisms for federal agencies and the states to coordinate STEM education strategies.

“We need to focus our efforts in teaching the scientists and engineers of tomorrow,” said Honda, a former science teacher and educator of more than 30 years. “Federal agencies unfortunately are not communicating among themselves. Current federal efforts in STEM education are neither coordinated, nor coherent, nor cooperative. This bill will create the mechanisms and venue for cooperative relationships to develop.”

Obama added that economic competitiveness depends on sound education policies.

“We must ensure our nation remains a global leader in scientific advancement and technological innovation, and that begins with strengthening America’s schools,” said Obama. “Our students deserve the education and skills they need to compete in today’s global economy and to understand the increasingly complex issues that face our democracy, and we must do everything we can to provide them with the resources and curriculum they need to succeed. This critical legislation will help students develop critical thinking and effective problem solving skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics by coordinating federal STEM education efforts, consolidating federal education initiatives, and supporting states in collaboratively organizing their efforts. I am proud to introduce this legislation with Congressman Honda, and look forward to moving it forward in Congress.”

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Among the bill’s original co-sponsors are Rep. George Miller, chairman of the House Committee on Labor and Education; Rep. Vernon Ehlers (R-MI); and Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ).

In 2006, the federal government sponsored 105 STEM education programs through 15 different

federal agencies at a cost of \$3.12 billion. Yet the following year, American students did poorly in a test offered world-wide that measures student proficiency in understanding and applying science. Microsoft's Bill Gates summarized the concerns when he said: "When I compare our high schools with what I see when I'm traveling abroad, I'm terrified for our workforce of tomorrow."

Honda's and Obama's bill would:

- Reorganize the President's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). OSTP has a STEM subcommittee that has remained largely dormant over the past few years. The bill would raise that subcommittee to a committee level, giving it a mandate to work proactively at designing coherent STEM strategies.
- Create an Office of STEM at the U.S. Department of Education at the assistant-secretary level. This office will coordinate STEM education initiatives among all federal agencies and have a seat at the OSTP STEM Committee.
- Institute a voluntary Consortium on STEM education. The Consortium would be integrated by no less than five states representing at least five of the nation's nine geographical regions. Its mission is to develop common content standards for K-12 STEM education, engineered at the state and local levels.
- Create the National STEM Education Research Repository. This would be a clearing house for educators to research the latest innovations in STEM. This will break the silos that keep creative programs from being replicated.

"Our nation's competitiveness in the global economy depends largely on our ability to graduate students who excel in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math," Ehlers said. "We must do all that we can as a nation to prepare students at every grade level so that they have a genuine interest and demonstrated skills in these fields. The jobs of tomorrow will require STEM education skills and our next generation of innovators will need them to succeed."

For educators, this bill promises to create tools and make available resources that are now scattered and isolated among federal agencies and the states.

"The Enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education Act of 2008 will coordinate and enhance STEM education programs at the federal level and empower states to better address the critical needs in their STEM education systems," said Gerald Wheeler,

Executive Director of the National Science Teachers Association. "We are pleased to support this legislation."

As the American economy attempts to recover from a deep economic downturn, losing sight of long term strategies to manage the economy can be risky, said Rep. Rush Holt.

"Scientists and educators should not be the only ones concerned about STEM education. Those who care about our long-term economic health and the ability of future generations to compete in a new global economy should be concerned," Holt said. "This legislation is part of our strategy to get STEM education back on track at a time when we can no longer afford to lose ground to our competitors."